Newsday 1/8/97

LIZ SMITH

The Mob and JFK

"SAM GIANCANA is buried in Chicago next to the father who used to tie him to a tree as a kid and beat him," goes a line in Giancana's "Biography" on A&E.

This week's "Godfathers" series has now offered up the history of the Chicago mob king. If and when A&E runs this one again, don't fail to watch. You'll never see a more perfect one-hour explanation of (1) the very squeaky narrow election of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, (2) the failure of the invading Cuban patriots at the Bay of Pigs, (3) the murder of the president in Dallas, (4) the assassination of brother Bobby Kennedy as he took the road to the White House, and (5) the germination of the whole outrageous tragedy when an arrogant, rich, bootlegger father set up his sons' fatal connection with the Mafia in the first place.

Newsday File Photo

John F. Kennedy
A clear explanation

Do you perhaps think, as I do, that the famous Warren Commission findings on the JFK assassination were the blind leading the blind? You will after you see the Sam Giancana "Biography" It's all there — clear, if not exactly simple.

* * *

IN JANUARY'S issue of Vanity Fair, I wrote the saga of how JFK used his young lover Judith Campbell to carry money and messages to Sam Giancana. Yet many naysayers still question Judith's veracity and scoff when she says that Kennedy felt she was a "safe" conduit to Sam. But A&E makes it all inescapably logical.

The Kennedys tapped the mob to assassinate Fidel Castro, promising to give the Mafia back its Cuban casinos when the Communist leader was eliminated. Giancana did everything to get Jack Kennedy elected by a mere 9,000 votes in Chicago. Then Giancana felt he had JFK in his pocket. The CIA (via Robert Maheu, who appears on the "Biography" special) made the government's offer to Chicago's Giancana, Vegas' Johnny Rosselli, and the underworld kingpins of Louisiana and Florida.

The president, uncertain of the CIA, then used Judith Campbell, first

to take money to the mob, and then to carry his own personal "kill Castro" messages to Giancana. The CIA helped Cuban exiles invade Cuba, promising them air cover. JFK, thinking the CIA incompetent, feeling they had goofed, called off the air support. The Cuban patriots died on Cuban beaches.

Bobby Kennedy, the attorney general, knew perfectly well that JFK was sending messages to Giancana via Judith. But he had hated the Mafia for years and despised the union king Jimmy Hoffa, whose Teamster money had built the casinos of Vegas for the mob. When Bobby went after Hoffa and the Mafia, he stirred up an embittered Giancana. Having the president "in his pocket" had not paid off. (Giancana's personal feelings for Judith may also have added to his hatred of the Kennedys.)

So the Mafia arranged for its New Orleans branch to set up the murder of the 35th president in Dallas. Members of the Marcello crime family said openly that the president would be hit. One of them bragged they'd get "a nut" to do it for them. And Lee Harvey Oswald died saying he'd merely been a "patsy." Jack Ruby, who shot Oswald before he could talk, had connections to the Chicago mob and begged the Warren Commission to take him to Washington so he could speak. They refused. He died, and some think his death from "cancer" was something else.

Bobby Kennedy was shocked and guilty that his zeal had caused Jack's death. But then the mob arranged to finish off Bobby in Los Angeles — once they discovered he might make it to the White House. What the Mafia didn't need was an anti-mob fanatic as president!

And the rest is history, including Giancana's own death just before he was to testify for the Church committee. Johnny Rosselli also died after testifying and talking too much.

* * *

IN MY Vanity Fair story, what could not be proved or verified was Judith Campbell Exner's assertion that about a year before JFK's death, she found herself pregnant with his child. She said that Giancana arranged for an abortion to be performed at Chicago's Grant Hospital. Exner has always thought and hoped that the release of Giancana's phone conversations and other tapes would prove this. But many still think she is just a sensation seeker, hoping to slime the memory of JFK.

ABC-TV has already proved that Exner did indeed have a pregnancy terminated at Grant Hospital on the dates she says she did. And now I hear that the Church committee has known for years, but kept it secret, that she had JFK's baby aborted to save herself and the president from total scandal back in 1962.

I expect to be able to prove that the committee sat on this information for years, refusing to let Judith Exner's assertions and unpleasant truths be confirmed. But it may take a little more time.